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846 "In delivery of the afterbirth, which takes place just after the cord has been severed, the midwife pulls on the cord with her right hand while with her left hand she presses [190] on the patient's abdomen so as to force out the placenta (1). When the latter offers

(1) The midwives of Upper Laos do not take any steps to free the placenta. This organ comes out by itself, although the time it takes may vary. After its expulsion it is placed (together with the strip of bamboo used as a knife to cut the cord and with the clots of blood) in the bamboo cylinder mentioned above. Then the whole is immediately buried under the threshold of the house or at the foot of one of the stringers of the ladder or staircase giving access to the house. (Author's note.)

too much resistance the parturient woman lies down on her stomach and presses heavily on the ground, while the midwife continues to pull on the cord and assists the patient's efforts with one hand.

846 "If a uterine hemorrhage does not ensue the vagina is bathed with spiced water, the patient's legs are placed together and she is then laid in front of a fire of live coals where she must remain for nine days, her abdomen facing the heat (2). During these nine days

(2) Thirty days for primiparous women and from seventeen to twenty days for pluriparous women, in northern Laos. (Author's note.)

she must abstain from eating certain foods, and particularly from chewing betel because of this plant's astringent qualities. She swallows a certain amount of salt every day and drinks laxative tisanes which are often made with grapefruit rinds. The genitalia are bathed for the first five days after delivery, always with slightly spiced water.

"If a uterine hemorrhage occurs after delivery the parturient woman is made to swallow about fifty grams of urine to which a heavy dose of spiced oil has been added. The vagina is bathed with a decoction of highly astringent plants, among which the dried bark of the areca palm may be mentioned.

846 "At the end of confinement the midwife extinguishes the fire
431 herself and receives a few gifts (3) which vary with the condition of

(3) These gifts generally consist of a skirt, a scarf, small jewels,

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wax candles decorated with flowers, cigarettes and a sum of money. (Author's note)

the family from the hands of her patient.

"Two or three days after her confinement ends the mother must [751] go to the pagoda and give a few presents to the bonzes, who give her in return a few cotton threads which she fastens to her wrists " (4). [792]

(4) Dr. Estrade, 1895. Dictionnaire et Guide franco-laotien. [113]

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Cases of dystocia and other childbearing difficulties are very rare in Laos, thanks to the physiological law which decrees that childbirth shall occur all the more naturally insofar as one comes closer to the primitive type and as one's body has not been deformed either by certain professional attitudes or by artifices of dress. [191] But when any difficulty of this type does occur the Laotian midwives are extremely skilful. Their hands take the place of the steel instruments in our gynecological and surgical arsenal, and their results are usually successful both for mother and child.

When the newly delivered mother is allowed to get up there [554] occur traditional feasts and celebrations, the brilliance of which varies with the status of the young mother's parents. It is generally 846 during these happy gatherings that the bonzes or sorcerers choose 527 the name which the newborn child is to bear. They usually base their choice on some peculiarity of the coloring or eyes, or on a phase of 551 the moon. The name will be replaced by another if the child falls sick, for in this case, as they say, the old name was unpleasing to his "Phis," that is to say to his personal tutelary spirits.

Infanticide. Scarcely any cases of infanticide can be cited in 847 Laos, and abortions are extremely rare or at least very well hidden. For when cases do occur it is among members of a class which, be- [554] cause of the rank it holds, is anxious to conceal its faults from the mass of the people.

In popular belief abortion, whether voluntary or natural, is regarded as a punishment of heaven or as a case of aberration which cannot fail to draw down the utmost scorn on the guilty parties and their accomplices.

Marriage. Marriage in Laos is made ready for long in advance, 584 thanks to the liberty which young people of both sexes enjoy. The latter meet one another at every celebration and can communicate

sebaceous scum of the fetus and so make the birth easier. She should 843
wash her hair from time to time with water in which she has soaked
an eel's tail [53] and some rice. She takes hold of the eel's tail to
tie her hair. This will result in the head of the fetus becoming
more slippery, and the birth will become easier.

If the pregnant woman has to protect herself from spirits, it must 843
not be forgotten that certain of her actions may be disastrous to those 777
around her. She must not enter a new house for fear of attracting ill
fortune to its owner. She must not attend a wedding for she would
bring ill luck to the new couple. The husband of the pregnant woman
loses a part of his khouan (see above). He also becomes unfortunate
in hunting and in games of chance.

The Delivery. This cannot take place in the house of the 844
woman brought to bed, otherwise the greatest misfortune would
descend on the owner of the building. Sometimes the parents have
a cabin built where the woman giving birth will spend the whole time
of her delivery.

When the woman feels the first pains, all objects that are fastened
or hooked on, such as earrings, are removed. She keeps only her
skirt on and remains sitting during the whole time of her labor.
Opposite her hangs a cord to which she holds on at the moment of
birth, for this position will facilitate the descent of the fetus. If
the birth is prolonged, decoctions and liniments are used to help the
operation.

At the time of expulsion, the newly born is left between the
legs of its mother until the delivery. It is only when the placenta
has emerged, that the cord is cut with a bamboo blade. If it were
cut with a steel blade, the child would run the risk of meeting a
violent death. The thread used for tying the cord on girls is taken
from a spinning wheel, so that later she will become a good spinner.
The placenta is usually buried under one of the stairways of the house
[54], otherwise the fertility of the parents would run the risk of drying
up.

After the Delivery. After the delivery, the woman who 846
has given birth sits on a bed of finely pulverized kitchen salt, so that
the after effects may be normal. Than she takes a hot bath and
changes her clothes. After that begins for her the You Kam "to sub-
mit to penitence."

She lies down on a low bed placed against a large clay hearth
of the same size as the bed, on which is a large caldron used to pre-
pare a decoction of aromatic or medicinal plants to be put into the
sitz baths and hot body affusions which she must have frequently.

846 Next to her the child lies in a kadong (Indochinese van). Between the mattress and the kadong lies a dagger if it is a boy, a needle with some sewing thread if it is a girl, so that later the child may become a strong and brave man or a woman skilled in domestic arts.

844 The accoucheur, who is also a sorcerer, hangs on the roof a fishnet which reaches the ground and must completely cover the bed of the woman and the kadong of the newborn child. An incantation is recited intended to protect the mother and child from the Phi Phai, the souls of women who have died in childbirth or while pregnant, and which take the form of a night bird. The sorcerer stretches a white cotton thread around the bed and the hearth which will act as a barrier to the Phi Phai, and which also has the property of preventing the mother and child from having attacks of nausea [les bourbouilles].

846 In addition to the very frequent affusions and sitz baths, the woman takes every day two or three aromatic vapor baths. Her meals taken 262 inside the fishnet consist of rice, grilled chicken or pork seasoned with grilled salt and mixed with houa kha (a kind of gingerbread). She may drink only [55] hot decoctions of the root of a wild vine which has diuretic properties.

846 During the You Kam people take turns day and night helping the family watch over the mother and child. In order to keep awake 597 they read aloud, make music, sing or play. This is the custom of the vigil, the ngan which takes place whenever there is a feast or any other event.

The You Kam finishes at the end of eight days in Lower Laos, but lasts more than twenty days in the north.

Churching of Women. A day of ceremony is chosen for the woman who is leaving her childbed (ok Kam). This ok kam always takes place in the morning. The woman takes her bath in the river, while all the accessories which have served for the kam are removed. When she returns to the house, she attends the ceremony of the Sou Khouan. After this she takes up her normal life again, although she is obliged to abstain from certain foods which are liable to bring on post partum hemorrhages. When the mother and child are in good health, these alimentary precautions are relaxed fairly soon, and by the end of the second month many of these rules 853 are broken. Laotian mothers are in the habit of giving their children, as soon as the ok kam is performed, chewed rice, seasoned with salt, wrapped in a banana leaf and warmed on hot ashes. The newborn usually stand this diet fairly well.